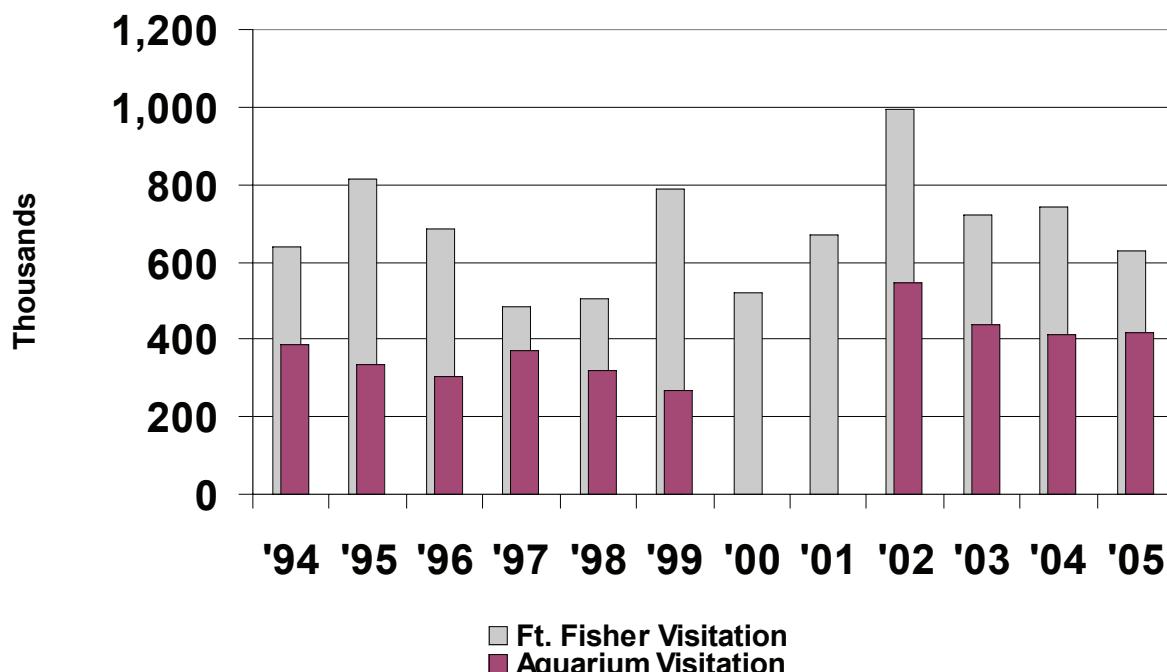


## **IV. PARK AND RECREATION DEMAND AND TRENDS**

### **ANNUAL VISITATION TRENDS**

Fort Fisher State Recreation Area's annual visitation for the twelve years from 1994 through 2005 is shown below in Figure IV-1. Prior to 1999, two traffic counters were used to record visitation. One was located near the entrance to Loggerhead Road and the other near the entrance to the Fort Fisher Aquarium parking lot. Visitation at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area since 1999 has been recorded by one vehicle traffic counter located just inside the recreation area property on Loggerhead Road, the entrance road to the recreation area. Visitors to the Fort Fisher Aquarium also cross the traffic counter, and there is no present method of entirely separating visitation to the two units. Some visitors visit both the aquarium and recreation area, and aquarium staff even use the state recreation area lands for some educational programs.

Prior to 1999, a per-vehicle multiplier of four persons was used. Following on-site surveys conducted by park staff, the per-vehicle multiplier was changed to three persons to more accurately reflect the average vehicle occupancy. Visitation figures prior to the multiplier change were not adjusted retroactively.



**Figure IV-1. Annual Visitation: 1994 - 2005**

Aquarium visitation is also shown in Figure IV-1. Prior to May of 1994, aquarium visitation was recorded using a vehicle counter at the entrance to the parking lot. Since that time, aquarium visitation, both paid and free, has been recorded at the entrance sales window and reconciled with receipts daily; it is, therefore, more exact than visitation recorded by traffic counters.

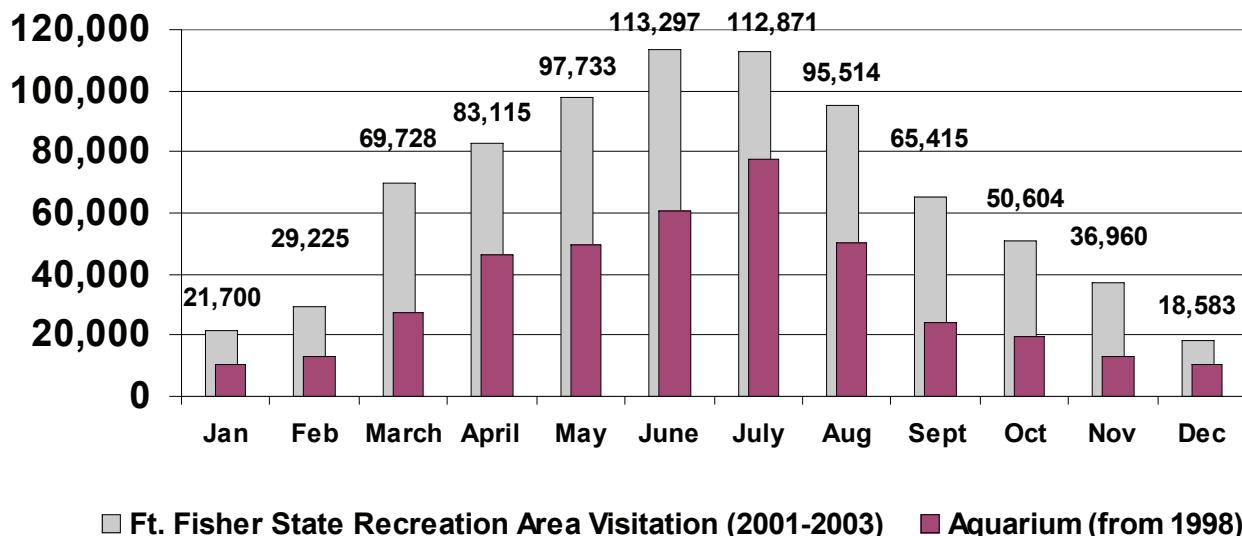
The aquarium was closed for renovation and expansion in December of 1999 and did not reopen

until over two years later, in March of 2002. During 2000 and 2001, when the aquarium was closed, visitation recorded for the state recreation area did not drop as much as one might have expected.

Bad weather and storms impact visitation at Fort Fisher and at other state park units as well. While rain and cold weather will lessen attendance at the state recreation area, such weather may actually result in people that cannot use the beach going instead to the aquarium.

### MONTHLY VISITATION TRENDS

Figure IV-2 shows the average monthly visitation at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area for the three years ending in 2003. Fort Fisher State Recreation Area's monthly visitation increases in the spring as the weather warms, peaks in June and July at about 113,000, and then decreases each month through the end of the year. The monthly visitation pattern suggests using seasonal and peak load personnel to assist in months of higher visitation. Where possible, staff vacation and other leave should be scheduled at times other than the higher visitation months. Also shown in Figure IV-2 is the average monthly visitation for the Fort Fisher Aquarium from January 1988 through June of 2004, excluding the two plus years that the aquarium was closed for expansion. The aquarium's monthly visitation pattern mirrors that of the state recreation area.



**Figure IV-2. Average Monthly Visitation**

### VISITOR INFORMATION

In 1987 the United States Forest Service was contracted to conduct a Public Area Recreation Visitors Survey (PARVS) for the North Carolina State Parks System. The survey was designed to identify visitor socio-economic characteristics and economic contributions to the state's economy. Since Fort Fisher State Recreation Area was not one of the eight park units involved in the survey, but the general information concerning state park visitors is useful in assessing visitation trends at the park.

Why do people visit state park units? The convenient location was cited by 31 percent of the respondents; 25 percent thought other areas were too crowded; 21 percent liked the quality facilities; 8 percent wanted to try a new area; 7 percent enjoyed the scenic beauty; and 6 percent came to see the attraction.

More than one third of state park visitors come from within a 30-mile radius (37 percent), while 17 percent come from 30 to 60 miles away. Survey respondents indicated that the parks were their sole destination 86 percent of the time. While many visitors come from nearby, the average one-way distance traveled was 139 miles. Approximately 25 percent of state park visitors come from out of state. Visitors averaged 4.1 trips per year to North Carolina state parks.

Seventy-eight percent of those surveyed indicated that they were return visitors. The average number of return trips per year was six. Sixty-one percent of visitors statewide came with family members, 16 percent with friends, and 7 percent with both family and friends. Ten percent of visitors came alone. Visitors also came in small numbers in organized groups and multiple families.

PARVS data indicates that 16.8 percent of groups surveyed used more than one car, and that the average number of persons per car was 3.0. The average age of the park visitor was 38.2 years. The age distribution was as follows:

**Table IV-1. Percent of Visitors by Age Group**

| <u>Under 6</u> | 6-12 | 13-18 | 19-25 | 26-35 | 36-45 | 46-55 | 56-65 | Over 65 |
|----------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| 6.7            | 11.6 | 10.6  | 12.5  | 20.1  | 16.9  | 0.9   | 7.3   | 4.4     |

Since over 18 percent of visitors are under the age of 13, a demand exists for children's programs and facilities. Approximately 12 percent of visitors are 56 and older. This older segment of the general population will be increasing, and as it does, demand for improved quality, accessibility, and safety should increase.

## **OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPATION IN NORTH CAROLINA**

The five most popular outdoor recreation activities in North Carolina are walking for pleasure, driving for pleasure, viewing scenery, participating in beach activities, and visiting historical sites. Three out of every four households participated in walking for pleasure at least once in the past 12 months (Table IV-2). In addition to the five most popular activities, over fifty percent of the households responding to a 1989 survey participated at least once in the following activities: swimming (in lakes, rivers, or oceans), visiting natural areas, picnicking, attending sports events, visiting zoos, and freshwater fishing.

The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey was mailed to 3,100 randomly selected residents in the spring of 1989. Forty-five percent, or 1,399 people, returned completed surveys. Each person receiving the survey was asked to estimate the number of times that household members had participated in each of 43 activities. The survey results provide good insight into the current

participation of North Carolinians in a wide range of outdoor recreation activities. The survey results also closely mirror those of the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment conducted in 1994-1995 and 2000.

**Table IV-2. Outdoor Recreation Activities Ranked by Popularity.**

| RANK | ACTIVITY                                | PERCENTAGE<br>OF HOUSEHOLDS<br>PARTICIPATING |
|------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1.   | Walking for Pleasure                    | 75%                                          |
| 2.   | Driving for Pleasure                    | 72                                           |
| 3.   | Viewing Scenery                         | 71                                           |
| 4.   | Beach Activities                        | 69                                           |
| 5.   | Visiting Historical Sites               | 62                                           |
| 6.   | Swimming (in Lakes, Rivers, and Oceans) | 54                                           |
| 7.   | Visiting Natural Areas                  | 53                                           |
| 8.   | Picnicking                              | 52                                           |
| 9.   | Attending Sports Events                 | 52                                           |
| 10.  | Visiting Zoos                           | 51                                           |
| 11.  | Fishing - Freshwater                    | 50                                           |
| 12.  | Use of Open Areas                       | 41                                           |
| 13.  | Swimming (in Pools)                     | 40                                           |
| 14.  | Fishing - Saltwater                     | 38                                           |
| 15.  | Attending Outdoor Cultural Events       | 35                                           |
| 16.  | Bicycling for Pleasure                  | 32                                           |
| 17.  | Other Winter Sports                     | 31                                           |
| 18.  | Camping, Tent or Vehicle                | 29                                           |
| 19.  | Softball and Baseball                   | 28                                           |
| 20.  | Hunting                                 | 28                                           |
| 21.  | Use of Play Equipment                   | 28                                           |
| 22.  | Power Boating                           | 26                                           |
| 23.  | Trail Hiking                            | 26                                           |
| 24.  | Jogging or Running                      | 24                                           |
| 25.  | Basketball                              | 24                                           |
| 26.  | Nature Study                            | 22                                           |
| 27.  | Golf                                    | 22                                           |
| 28.  | Target Shooting                         | 20                                           |
| 29.  | Water Skiing                            | 19                                           |
| 30.  | Camping, Primitive                      | 14                                           |
| 31.  | Tennis                                  | 14                                           |
| 32.  | Use Motorcycles, Dirt Bikes, ATVs       | 13                                           |
| 33.  | Use Four Wheel Drive Vehicles           | 13                                           |
| 34.  | Canoeing and Kayaking                   | 13                                           |
| 35.  | Horseback Riding                        | 12                                           |
| 36.  | Volleyball                              | 12                                           |
| 37.  | Downhill Skiing                         | 12                                           |
| 38.  | Football                                | 11                                           |
| 39.  | Soccer                                  | 7                                            |
| 40.  | Sailboating                             | 7                                            |
| 41.  | Skateboarding                           | 6                                            |
| 42.  | Cross Country Skiing                    | 2                                            |
| 43.  | Windsurfing                             | 1                                            |

## PRIORITIES OF PUBLIC OUTDOOR RECREATION FUNDING

The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Survey asked residents a series of questions in order to identify and rank future demand for various types of public outdoor recreation activities. Future demand was determined by asking them which activities they would have tried more often had adequate facilities been available. Respondents were then asked to rank these activities in order of importance. A scoring system was used assigning each activity a rating of high, moderate or low future demand based on the survey results.

In the second part of the analysis, the respondents' level of support for publicly funded outdoor recreation activities was determined by asking them to identify and rank those activities to which government should give highest priority when spending public money. The same scoring system used to analyze unmet demand was then applied to the survey results, with each activity receiving a high, moderate or low rating in public support for public funding.

In the final part of the needs analysis, the two ratings for each activity were combined to produce a score from one to nine that reflected both future demand and public funding priorities. The activities that ranked high in both future demand and support for public funding received the highest priority in the needs assessment. Support for public funding was given higher priority than expressed demand (Table IV-3).

**Table IV-3. Priorities for Future Outdoor Recreation Activities**

| ACTIVITY                        | CODE | FUTURE DEMAND | SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC FUNDING |
|---------------------------------|------|---------------|----------------------------|
| Walking for Pleasure            | 1    | High          | High                       |
| Camping, Tent or Vehicle        | 1    | High          | High                       |
| Picnicking                      | 1    | High          | High                       |
| Beach Activities                | 1    | High          | High                       |
| Fishing - Freshwater            | 1    | High          | High                       |
| Attend Outdoor Cultural Events  | 1    | High          | High                       |
| Visiting Natural Areas          | 2    | Moderate      | High                       |
| Use of Play Equipment           | 2    | Moderate      | High                       |
| Visiting Zoos                   | 2    | Moderate      | High                       |
| Visiting Historical Sites       | 2    | Moderate      | High                       |
| Bicycling for Pleasure          | 3    | High          | Moderate                   |
| Swimming (in Pools)             | 3    | High          | Moderate                   |
| Viewing Scenery                 | 4    | Moderate      | Moderate                   |
| Hunting                         | 4    | Moderate      | Moderate                   |
| Trail Hiking                    | 4    | Moderate      | Moderate                   |
| Use of Open Areas               | 4    | Moderate      | Moderate                   |
| Target Shooting                 | 4    | Moderate      | Moderate                   |
| Swimming (Lakes, Rivers, Ocean) | 4    | Moderate      | Moderate                   |
| Fishing - Saltwater             | 4    | Moderate      | Moderate                   |

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